

Scottish **Left** Review

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TRANSFORMATION
CAN SCOTLAND SPREAD ITS WINGS?

Scottish Left Review

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Comment

It is difficult to maintain constitutional neutrality at this tail-end of 2013. Of course we will continue to do our best to keep the SLR open as a space for anyone on the Scottish left, a place where they can feel at home and contribute to a debate that stretches beyond the boundaries of party or constitutional position. That is our duty as a magazine created expressly for that purpose.

But the duty lies not only on us to keep that space open but on all sides to fill that space. Because it can surely not be possible for us to face the desolation which lies across Scottish society in the dog-days of this unlucky year without some sort of answer to what lies all around us.

What answer to Grangemouth? Facile talk of 'the need to work together' is an insult to the collective intelligence. All it states is that if we keep the fork and let others keep the knife, it will be impossible for us to eat on our own. That may not be a bad thing, but someone needs to explain why. How is the capacity for Westminster to offer a loan guarantee of £120m because the Scottish Parliament doesn't have the power to do it a convincing answer to the problem of that national crisis? We watched as a part of our key national infrastructure was bought by an equity company controlled by one man who borrowed the money to own it. We watched as that man, again and again across the UK and internationally, sought to subject both governments and working men and women to his will. We have seen again and again that failure to capitulate to his demands is met with aggressive attempts to undermine democracy and sabotage the economic wellbeing of the economies and societies that created these vast enterprises in the first place. We observed a decade-long campaign to defeat any vestiges of industrial democracy which, in his eyes, blighted his divine right to run 'his' businesses as dictatorships of one. We watched as this culminated in a coordinated attempt to bring Scotland close to its knees as just another gambit in his totalitarian approach to nation and citizen. Then we watched as a defeated union was - still is - subjected to a vast smear and hate campaign run by a rabidly right-wing media cheered on by a rabidly right-wing government.

How is a £120m bung to this man a response, an answer? How?

Grangemouth, the shipyard job losses, continuing austerity; in these dark days for Scottish society, we need answers and not just soundbites

We need proper media ownership laws, proper industrial relations legislation, a national strategy on the ownership of key industries, a stronger position on the practices of the equity ownership model, an industrial diversification strategy to make us less reliant on one large enterprise, a finance system that makes these things possible. We, in our 'partnership' are offered none of these things. Jim Radcliffe is offered free money.

How is this an answer?

What answer to Govan and shipbuilding? How is a UK industry sector declining before our eyes with no remedial action a reason to celebrate 'partnership'? How do we come to terms with what is an entirely state-dependent business which survives on state funding (but only to build weapons) but over which we seem to have no democratic control at all? The voices which shout 'they'll reopen Portsmouth if you vote Yes' do not seem to understand capitalism. Who is it that will open Portsmouth? Much as English MPs might like it to be so, are they proposing to nationalise BAE Systems? Don't they understand that they gave up all right to guide British industry for political purposes when they privatised it all?

If we did have any control over our industry there are lots of things we might do, from encouraging diversification to targeting non-military sources of contracts. But we don't. It would certainly make more sense (marginally) to keep building useless aircraft carriers (which have no purpose but create jobs) than to build the useless Trident replacement (that has no purpose and doesn't create jobs in Britain). The result of Trident replacement is that we are consigned to sit here and watch as military orders dry up and shipyards close. There is absolutely no Plan B.

How is this an answer?

Food banks are the latest symbol

of outrage that politicians who want to appear 'progressive' or compassionate troop out when needed. They are all horrified by the sight of 'hard working people having to beg for handouts to be able to eat'. Fine; but how is austerity an answer to this? We know that the economy is not fixing itself in a way that will end low pay (virtually none of the 'recovery' is in industrial production which might give some reason for optimism). Yes,

Ed Milliband has mentioned 'living wage' more recently. But he offers only a marginal tax credit to companies for a limited period if they will only 'do the decent thing' and pay the wage. Most won't, and for the legions of Britons for whom the problem is that they can't get enough hours or who can't raise a family by earning living wage, nothing is proposed. We shall plough on and hope that the City of London and the housing market get us relected on the basis of the illusion of competence.

How is this an answer? How is any of this an answer to the dire mess that is Britain today?

Now, the standard response to this from the pro-union left is 'but Alex Salmond is a bad man and the SNP is even more right-wing'. People are free to hold that opinion if they wish. But an opinion that provides a reason not to do one thing is hopelessly insufficient if it is not matched with an idea of something else that can be done instead. Saying (for example) 'only electing a Labour government will put the power needed in the hands of the people who

will use it well' is again fine. Except the needed power could lie anywhere which takes full sovereign control, so the answer is not 'where' but 'who and how'? So who and how? Before we vote in September next year, explain how Scotland can be protected from the Jim Ratcliffes of this world. Explain how we rebuild an industry in our country. Explain how we challenge the political doctrine of 'austerity' which is nothing more than a term for the dismantling of the welfare state. Tell us how these things can be done - this space is open for you; we will publish your ideas.

In the meantime, this issue looks at the transformations that could provide answers to these questions but from the perspective of what would happen after independence. It looks at a process of rebuilding post-Yes and explores the potential - and the risks - inherent in that process.

No, that our five writers can write it does not mean it will happen. But it is at least a path, a hint of a way forward. We must build our decision on possibility. So let us populate the land of possibility. All are welcome. ■

Scottish Left Review

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Democracy in writing

You wouldn't think it from the anodyne bun-fight played out in the 24-hour news cycle over the referendum, but independence is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reshape Scottish society. For those of us longing for a more equitable

society it opens the door to a state where privilege, schooling and networking do not dictate who our leaders are, where the centuries-old stratification of our society can be shaken like a snow globe and made better. It's about changing not just who governs us, but how we are governed and where power lies. Establishing priorities, rights and responsibilities

by and for the people who live and work in Scotland then becomes the manifesto by which the Government (of whatever persuasion) must abide.

We can cast off the perverse pride that Westminster holds on being one of only three democracies without a written constitution, where Parliamentary sovereignty reigns supreme and locks in place a system that discourages participation and interest in how we are governed. Notwithstanding plans to bind the next Parliament to an in-out EU referendum in 2017, these ideals (if they can be called that) are not likely to change any time soon - the constant sabre-rattling broadsides against the ECHR emanating from Westminster hardly suggest that the Mother of Parliaments is ready to roll back the boundaries of the muddled, unwritten morass of UK constitutional law to suit its citizens any time soon.

As things stand, we live in an

ossified democracy, where generations of paternalistic governance and false hope after false hope have hollowed out participatory democracy. Jimmy Reid's famous rectorial address identified the roots of this alienation as lying within

our political system: "It's the frustration of ordinary people excluded from the processes of decision making. The feeling of despair and hopelessness that pervades people who feel with justification that they have no real say in shaping or determining their own destinies" My support for independence has always stemmed

from a belief that involving people in their communities, and returning as much power over local matters to local people, is the best system of governance, and is a system that the broken stasis of Westminster will not deliver. The work of Nordic Horizons and the Jimmy Reid Foundation in laying bare just how little the citizens of this country are trusted to run their own affairs in comparison to other countries has only further proven how our centralised, demoralising institutions are broken.

With independence, we can change these relationships between those who govern and the governed. We will finally have a chance to put in place a written constitution that codifies the relationship between the different branches of government and, most importantly, enumerates the rights that every citizen can reasonably expect. Although there will undoubtedly be differences of opinion on what these rights and relationships should be, the process of

putting together this constitution for a new Scotland, if done inclusively and positively, could really help kick-start political engagement in our new nation and lay down a marker that Scotland is changing for the better.

However, the window for achieving this change is narrow. The state of flux that a vote for independence will bring will not last forever, and by the time Scotland goes to the polls to elect its first independent Parliament in 2016 our opportunity could already have been lost, particularly if partisan rancour stalls any movement towards an all-party and no-party 'Team Scotland' approach to post-independence negotiations.

The 'no-party' element of any constitutional process is, to me, the more important factor. In the few meetings that I've had with what could loosely be termed Scottish civic society, there's clearly a lot of interest in the process of writing a new constitution for Scotland. The work of So Say Scotland, who have been providing a politically neutral space for small groups to think about the issues surrounding the independence referendum, is just one of many examples of how pooling resources and innovative thinking across civic society can have a positive impact on political engagement and encourage those who feel like their voices are never heard to take part and speak up.

What the Scottish Government has said so far on the process of adopting a written constitution is very encouraging for those of us that want to see an organic, grassroots approach. The Scottish Government have already stated that "when the process of determining the constitution gets underway, [it] will be just one of many voices", and that it "should be prepared in a spirit of national unity". In other words, after the referendum. The Government has also proposed the establishment of a Constitutional Convention, with an encouraging nod towards the Icelandic process, as an integral part of this process.

The Icelandic model of 'constitutional crowdsourcing' has attracted international academic interest, and was heralded as yet another Nordic democratic innovation that empowered citizens rather than institutions. After

Jean Urquhart argues that the chance to write a constitution for Scotland is the chance to enshrine participative democracy - as long as the process is not left to the politicians.

randomly selecting 950 individuals from the register of voters, 25 of these were elected to form a Constitutional Assembly, which was annulled by the Icelandic Supreme Court but then re-constituted by the Icelandic Parliament as a Constitutional Council. The Council's proposals, which were open to contributions and comments from the public on its website, included national referenda (Swiss-style 'direct democracy'), freedom of information provisions and national ownership of natural resources. These elements of the Constitutional Bill, along with many others, were supported by the Icelandic people in the national referendum held on 20 October 2012.

However, the Icelandic experience should also act as a cautionary tale for how this people-led process was blatantly disregarded by the politicians. After refusing to hold a vote to ratify the Constitutional Bill, the Parliament then declared that any constitutional

amendments would require a two thirds majority in Parliament and, in a haunting similarity to the 1979 devolution referendum in Scotland, the support of 40 per cent of all voters to pass.

I don't doubt the sincerity of the Scottish Government when it speaks of only forming part of the process; however, its caveat that it would be for Parliament to decide on the process of adopting a written constitution, and recent events in Iceland, highlight even more the need for the churches, trade unions, and the rest of civic Scotland to keep up the pressure to ensure that this process is driven by the people and not by Parliament. The hangover from the infamous 40 per cent rule of 1979 haunted Scotland until 1997, and I'm not sure if Scotland's national psyche could withstand another establishment hijack.

After a Yes vote, the establishment stranglehold on democracy will,

momentarily, be broken. The moment must be seized. If the Scottish state is to be reshaped so it's not simply a paler shade of the UK, then the long-lasting constitutional apparatus of the state must be debated and decided upon by the people - not by the politicians.

It seems important that the issue of the written constitution needs to be discussed at every meeting, and should be in every speech made promoting independence. It is the evidence and the insurance we need in these days of political cynicism.

In the early days of the first SNP minority government the 'National Conversation' was launched. While it had value as an idea it seemed not to be maintained or developed, or perhaps the conversation seemed to be one sided. We need the national conversation to garner national opinion and awaken every voter to the implication and opportunity that their vote affords. With so many different agencies and organisations and individuals declaring the importance of the written constitution it needs now to be in the hands of every one with a vote, regardless of their vote in the referendum itself.

Until there is a Yes vote in the referendum, these discussions may be academic. However, it is important that we start planning the process, if not the content, for a written constitution now. We must look to those, such as Iceland, who have gone through the process recently, and learn from their experiences, both good and bad. We must begin to think about who will be involved at each stage of the process, how drafts will be made, challenged and rewritten, and how the people of Scotland will be intimately involved and not merely consulted. We must not allow apathy or cut corners to limit the scope, direction or content of the debate.

Most importantly, we must realise the tremendous prospect that lies before us. A Yes vote is not an end in itself, but the means to greater ends. If we can put in place a strong, inclusive, and inspiring document at the start of our journey, then anything will be possible in our new Scotland. ■



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Solid foundations for change

An independent Scotland would be more self-governing in two respects. It would have gained new competences, notably in finance and social welfare; and it would be free of constraints imposed by membership of the United Kingdom. Yet these in themselves by no means guarantee the ability to control the destiny of a nation. Scotland would still have to convert its new competences into policy capacity; and as a small nation

in a globalised world, it would need to develop the ability to set the terms of its engagement. In our present research project, we are examining the experience of small European states to see what can be learnt.

There are, to simplify, two modes of adaptation

to global markets. One is the market-liberal state, which fully accepts the logical of global capitalism and adjusts to its needs. Taxes, especially corporate taxes and higher rate income tax, are kept low in order to attract investment, with a concomitant low level of public expenditure and minimal welfare provision. There are pronounced economic cycles of boom and bust, with wages and public expenditures going up and down accordingly. Labour markets and environmental conditions are largely deregulated and government intervention in the economy is minimal. Some of the transition states of central Europe and the Baltic, with their flat income taxes and low corporate, taxes correspond to this model.

Another group of small states, however, has a large public sector, rather high taxes and extensive welfare provision. Here the public sector acts as a stabilising force in the face of economic cycles and public expenditure is seen as contributing, rather than detracting from growth. Public services are universal rather than selective and residual, in order to keep the middle classes on board, and social and economic

inequalities are contained. These are the social investment states, typified by the Nordic countries.

Independence supporters have often argued that Scotland needs first to gain independence and then it can decide democratically which policies to adopt. Yet the choice of strategy must be an integral part of the independence package itself if the case is to have any credibility.

If it is true, as some on the political right maintain (and celebrate), that small states are condemned by the demands of global competition to pursue market-liberal strategies, then there is no reason for left-of-centre voters to support it. If it is not true, then advocates of independence need to specify the alternative.

Nor is the case that we can cherry-pick items from each menu to suit our convenience. Cutting corporation tax in order to spark a race to the bottom with other European jurisdictions is not consistent with a social investment strategy; nor, alas, is it true that cuts in taxation pay for themselves through increased production. Ireland's experience during the boom is instructive here as it sought to combine the market-liberal with the social investment strategies, and so failed to use its newfound wealth to lay the foundations of a real welfare state or the infrastructure for long-term growth.

The social investment strategy has obvious attractions for the political left and, indeed, is the foundation of Nordic social democracy, although it is also compatible with a more conservative ideological orientation. It is also in line with the dominant trends in Scottish politics. Realising it in practice is another matter and requires particular conditions, some of which Scotland might have to create for itself. It implies rather high levels of taxation and a broad tax base since taxes on the rich alone are not enough. There needs to be a social consensus on the essentials

of the settlement. This does not require that everyone be a social democrat or complete agreement on policy but at least an acceptance of some of the basic elements. One is that public expenditure is not a mere drain on the purse but does come back in the form of increased welfare and can actually contribute to growth. Another is that vast inequalities of income and wealth, far from being a spur to the economy, are actually a hindrance to economic development.

Although we tend to think of Scotland as somehow naturally social democratic, this may be due to the absence of a viable conservative party rather than any natural proclivity. The evidence suggests that, individually, Scots are only slightly further to the left than England on the main issues. It takes political leadership to make the connections, including political parties prepared to abandon 'triangulation' (the technique of getting close enough to their opponents to steal their votes) and develop a clear vision. The political class also need to avoid the temptations of populism, such as debt-fuelled consumer booms or promising to spend the oil proceeds on current expenditure at the same time as creating a sovereign wealth fund. Norway, which has used its oil revenues in a vastly more intelligent manner than the UK, offers an example here.

The key issue here is the design of institutions, which can encourage positive-sum forms of politics, the wider public good and long-term thinking, while not stifling day-to-day politics and the disagreements that are the essence of democracy. Successful small states often practice social partnership, in which employers, trades unions and government come together to agree on long term goals and to overcome collective action problems. This can provide for adjustment to external shocks without mass unemployment and link bargaining about wages with a consideration of the 'social wage' in the form of welfare and public services. This kind of policy making was tried briefly in the United Kingdom in the 1970s but abandoned as bad 'corporatism' after 1979. In fact, for all its faults, it had managed to tame inflation without the mass unemployment or huge inequalities that marked policies in the 1980s. Elsewhere in Europe, it has been rediscovered in a

History is not destiny. New institutions can be built. Should Scotland gain independence without the tools to govern effectively, it could indeed end up at the mercy of corporate power – but there is another way.

Michael Keating outlines two future models for an independent Scotland and explains that if we want to pick the best of these it is too late to wait for democracy to fix bad systems

more flexible form as social concertation or 'lean corporatism'. It is perhaps surprising that post-devolution Scotland has not adopted anything similar, but rather followed the rest of the UK in what is essentially a market-driven approach. There is perhaps a more negotiated style of policy-making within individual sectors here but, despite some interest among trade unions, no return to peak-level agreements.

If social partnership is to be more than an excuse for the imposition of austerity, it needs strong and vibrant trade unions, another missing element in the Scottish (and UK) equation. It also requires that employers be at least willing to sit down at the table, rather than expecting to get their way on everything without giving in return. It also needs to be flexible enough to avoid creating multiple veto points and entrenching existing interests.

Social partnership is not the only element that is needed to meet the challenges of independence. The structure and organisation of government is also critical. The Scottish Government is descended from the old Scottish Office, which was not a policy-making department and has only slowly adapted to the challenge of being a government in its own right. It has gradually developed a more strategic capacity, focused on policy objectives rather than administrative divisions and has freed itself from some of the rigidities of the Whitehall model. Yet the budgetary process still tends to be rather incremental, making it difficult to shift resources into new priority areas. It has no doubt been wise to avoid creating something like the UK Treasury, whose reach has extended deep into Whitehall departments, centralising policy and imposing its will, a tendency which was massively intensified under Gordon Brown. On the other hand, there does need to be a central place where policy options can be compared and evaluated and resources directed to where they are most needed. There also needs to be more scrutiny of expenditure plans and outcomes by Parliament. The UK Coalition has created the Office of Budget Responsibility to hold itself to its own plans but, in a typical Whitehall fashion, has made OBR responsible to itself. Plans for a Scottish equivalent envisage that it be responsible to the Parliament and its remit

could be expanded to open up debate on where the money goes and how well it is being spent.

The good intention at devolution was that the Scottish Parliament would break with the Westminster model by being more open, less subservient to the executive and less concerned with partisan posturing. Despite some welcome differences, it has turned out very much in the Westminster mode and in some respects even worse. There are hardly any of the independent, awkward squad of members who still exist down south and rebellions against the whips are rare (while increasingly common in Westminster). Committees have mostly failed to get a grip on their brief, while those Westminster committees with strong leaders have begun to make a real name for themselves. Scotland, like the UK, has nurtured a self-reproducing class of professional politicians with little experience outside politics and who, once in Parliament, stay there until ejected by the voters. There is no regular circulation in and out of politics.

Over the last thirty years, the idea has become entrenched in British politics that the only possible mode of collective action is that of the market, and the only outside source of wisdom worth listening to is that of the business community. These are two separate issues since, as Adam Smith famously noted, business people, left to themselves, do not actually like markets, preferring monopolies and cartels. Yet the New Public Management has sought to create bogus markets in public services and to replicate business models right across the board, from the civil service, through education to the arts. Partnership, in UK parlance, usually refers to bringing in business interests to public policy (to the bafflement of some of my European colleagues for whom it means something much wider). Scotland has been spared some of the excesses of bogus markets in education and health but the idea that business always knows best is still widespread.

This, combined with excessive reliance on management consultants, has stripped government of the ability to manage large projects, to undertake contracts and to monitor compliance. Even the contracting out of contracts is often contracted out. Governments seem particularly gullible when it comes

to high technology, regularly being sold expensive, over-complex and unreliable solutions to complex problems by consultants and firms who know that, if anything goes wrong, they will be bailed out. The emerging fiasco of the implementation of Universal Credit was utterly predictable. Government needs to re-equip itself with the professional skills to meet the private sector on equal terms.

Small countries by definition have small governments, unable to mobilise the expertise and resources of large ones. It is therefore all the more important that they be focused on key priorities and know when and how to intervene. They have the advantage of having shorter lines of communication and able to make links across policy sectors. This may enable them to focus on objectives and avoid capture by the interests they are supposed to be regulating. This does not, however, happen automatically. Ireland shows how government can be captured by powerful interests (in that case the property industry) to the detriment of the wider good.

Political parties are not in good odour these days. They have an ever tighter grip on power but are less and less representative of anyone. Yet we still need them in order to pose policy alternatives and to provide responsible government. Scottish parties are little different from those elsewhere in the UK and in Europe, and desperately in need of renewal. They need internal democracy, more internal dissent and less discipline, and better links to civil society and local communities.

It is sometimes argued that the experience of the Nordic countries cannot be exported because of their unique history and culture. History does indeed matter and Scotland has a long way to go, but history is not destiny. New institutions can be built and, as they work, embed themselves in daily practice and understandings. Were Scotland to gain formal independence without equipping itself with the tools to govern effectively, it could indeed end up at the mercy of international markets and corporate power – but there is another way. ■

Michael Keating is Professor of Politics at the University of Aberdeen and the University of Edinburgh and Director of the Scottish Centre for Constitutional Change (www.futureukandscotland.ac.uk/projects/research-centre)

Our share of the future

Scotland owns 24 stops on the London Underground. So let the national debate begin; which ones do we want? And what shall we do with them? For example, could we take Westminster and simply close it? The extra walk from Victoria might aid the health of some of our more rotund MPs. Or perhaps we might take all stops in and around the City of London and simply add a 'bonus' onto the ticket price. It would be three or four hundred times the price of the ticket but we'd justify it on the basis that there is a competitive market in the field of bare-faced greed and that the bankers can hardly expect us not to maximise the value of our asset. By fleecing them.

Or perhaps we'll just take a cash value. After all, the London Underground was designated (by London politicians) as 'national infrastructure' and made the nation pay for it. That therefore makes it a shared asset. So is Diego Garcia, an entire island we stole from its inhabitants to build a military base. On the assumption we don't want a corner of it, we'll probably take that as a cash value. On the subject of islands, why don't we just guarantee our EU membership by offering Spain our nine per cent of Gibraltar as a sweetener? It's not like we have any real use for it.

The British State's overseas property portfolio is extensive and incredibly valuable - and nine per cent is ours. Along with nine per cent of military assets, nine per cent of the BBC, nine per cent of the London property portfolio of Whitehall. And so on.

One of the tricks that is being played in the referendum campaign is to present Scotland as a powerless supplicant in any negotiations over how assets and liabilities are to be divided between us if there is a Yes vote. It is the sound of the same-old establishment types explaining to us that the British Civil Service is peerless and Scotland would have no chance in negotiations against the finest fellows to emerge from the playing fields of England's private schools.

Another of the tricks is to make sure that no consideration of post-Yes processes must be allowed to consider secession negotiations as something positive. They must only

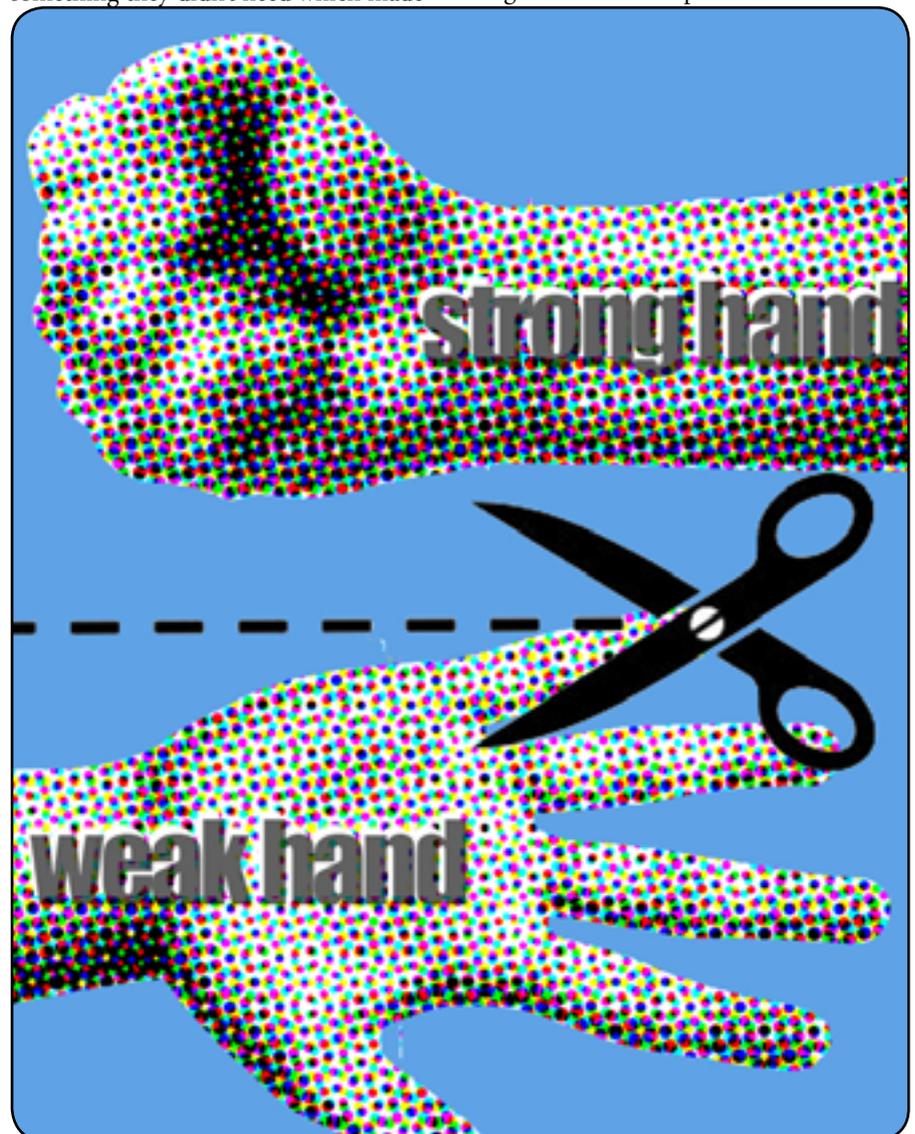
be understood as the process through which London punishes Scotland for its cheek and allocates to us the debts it has amassed. The idea that this might be a positive event for Scotland is not to be considered. The idea that this is a mutual process cannot be discussed. It is very simple; Scotland will damn well be paying off our share of the credit card bill but Whitehall is keeping the flat screen telly.

And now back into the real world. In fact, the track record of the negotiating powers of the civil service is not impressive. The litany of occasions on which it has been turned over by the private sector is too lengthy to consider properly. Just remember - they are paying billions for aircraft carriers they are going to park somewhere and ignore because they managed to agree a contract for something they didn't need which made

it more expensive to cancel the contract than to pay for a luxury weapon with no purpose. Either they are truly awful at negotiation or they routinely allow themselves to be out-negotiated. Either way, there seems little to fear.

In Scotland we have many people in our trade unions and our business community with more than a couple of years of negotiation behind them. They may not have made Winchester College's First Eleven but I suspect this won't leave them overly worried when a 'team Scotland' negotiating committee is put together. We have many first-rate lawyers and academics who will be more than capable of supporting those negotiations.

But do we have a negotiating hand? Again, to listen to the tone of the discussion you'd think Scotland will be lucky to come out of these negotiations still in possession of our



The process of negotiating the terms of separation if there is a Yes vote has been presented as one in which Scotland is bullied and weakened. Robin McAlpine argues that this is completely the wrong way to see negotiations.

underpants. After all, Ed Balls has told us that we're not getting to use Sterling and he's not bluffing. Now, aside from the fact that my observation has been that people who are not bluffing seldom say 'I'm not bluffing', I suspect he may be. If Sterling loses Scotland, overnight Sterling ceases to be a petrocurrency. I'm not sure the money markets will like that. They certainly won't like the fact that Sterling's balance of trade would collapse without North Sea Oil exports. And if Scotland is required to create its own currency (which I suspect we could manage just fine if we were forced), what mechanism is there for imposing on Scotland any part of our share of Sterling's national debt? In one night Sterling would become a much more indebted currency on the back of a significantly lower tax base with a serious balance of trade deficit and a serious hit to its international reputation. I have never believed that Scotland will be denied the use of Sterling.

But if it happens, if London follows through on a fraction of its threats (border posts to hem us in, total lack of military or security cooperation and all the rest) then London should understand that pig-headedness works two ways. So for example, in that context the next time the British military were to see any of its assets in Scotland might be on TV. If anyone is spluttering at that idea, why is 'you're not using our currency' any different than 'fine, you're not using Cape Wrath'. We might decide simply to stop selling electricity to England. Or perhaps we might designate all members of Tony Blair's government as war criminals and post arrest notices for them. We could repossess Daily Mail editor Paul Dacre's 3,000 acres of Scottish land and see him in court. Or we could just cut off the phone lines to

the tax collection centre in East Kilbride and London could just ask people to have a whip-round to fund their state instead.

Of course, we won't. But nor will London bomb our railway stations or refuse to give us our share of assets. In the real world, the rest of the UK could no more afford to destroy relations between our nations than could we. Now, this is most certainly not intended to be any form of macho posturing. It is an attempt to apply in the other direction the sort of sub-Swiftian parody that passes for debate. I had an extended conversation with a journalist in which I just couldn't get various obvious points across to him. He kept asking how we could afford to pay

for Royal Mail renationalisation. I had to point out that it would not be expensive (it is time some people educated themselves on international law regarding compulsory purchase). But I also had to point out that we'd be rebuilding an entire national infrastructure and that mail renationalisation would be a minor issue. How could we afford it all was all I was asked. Eventually I did lose my patience a little - "is your understanding that we will be given the national debt, deprived of all of our share of national infrastructure and be asked to muddle along as best we could, rebuilding what has been taken from us at our own expense?" That seemed to be the understanding.

So let's reset this discussion. If we vote for independence, Scotland would need to rebuild a redesign a large amount of the architecture of the state. We'd need to rebuild a national state broadcaster, a tax system, a foreign office, a military and much more. But we will be doing this with a mutual recognition that we are rebuilding things we own because they are being retained

by the partner nation. So we would negotiate the means to do it, either through redesign of our share of assets (where they are in country) or through reductions in the debt we would inherit. Understanding this isn't difficult once you dismiss all the silly stuff, once you pay attention to international norms of distributing assets and liabilities, once you stop seeing public finances through the farcical lense of 'all expenditure is tax revenue'. We will have the tools and the resources to rebuild. It is time to stop asking 'could we' and start the debate on the terms of 'what will we do?'

First, let's radically repair the UK systems as we rebuild. The chance to create a new tax system is one of the best opportunities we could be given; the need to reinvent our civil service might be a better opportunity still. Second, let's think about where we want to locate our new systems. Certainly no in Edinburgh; perhaps we might put our foreign office on the Fife coast and our tax collection system partly in run-down Ayrshire. Dumfries might get the citizenship and immigration policy jobs. And third, let us then think really creatively about what assets we really want. There might be a good case for taking the public share in RBS as a proportion of our assets, offering us a substantial starting-point for redesigning a banking system. We might think carefully about which overseas properties we might have an interest in and which not (there could be strong synergies in establishing a strong Scottish presence in the rapidly-growing Latin American nations).

It is time that we had a proper discussion about what sort of country we want to rebuild. To do that we need people to have a better understanding of the conditions in which we will be rebuilding. Those conditions will be much more favourable than you would believe from our newspapers. Scotland would do a good job of negotiating our independence, of that I'm in no doubt. It would leave us in a good position to start to rebuild the architecture of our society. What we do with that opportunity is up to us. So let's start thinking about it properly. ■

Robin McAlpine is Director of the Jimmie Reid Foundation

Graveyard or get-together

Having had years of experience in Scottish politics may not be the best qualification for discussing political realignment; it can seem like wandering through a graveyard. Certainly the record of starting new parties is dispiriting but the prospect of movement between parties or new coalitions may offer more potential.

But let's remember some of the disasters so that we can start from a realistic perspective. The 'breakaway' Scottish Labour Party was formed in 1976 because of Labour's perceived failure to produce a strong Scottish devolution scheme. Jim Sillars and John Robertson left the Parliamentary Labour Party to start the new party and were joined by Alex Neil who was a Labour research officer. They were supported by an impressive group of young talent – Colin Boyd (later Lord Advocate), John McAllion, Charlie Gordon (later leader of Glasgow City Council), Tom Nairn, Joe Farrell, former MP Maria Fyfe, Sheila Gilmore MP, Martin Sime (Director of SCVO). They had strong support from some of the most influential journalists in Scotland and big media coverage. Yet within two years they were a spent force. Internal disputes followed by expulsions had torn the party apart. One side argued that entryism by the IMG was the problem and the other side that it was autocratic leadership. The MPs lost their seats at the 1979 election and Jim Sillars then joined the SNP.

The SLP had a lot going for it. There was at this stage a very lacklustre and divided Labour Party while the SLP had well-known leading figures, an agenda that should have been popular and, to begin with, very good media. But it was less clear whether there was political space for them. The SNP had high credibility, eleven MPs and had won over 30 per cent of the vote in October 1974. Many of the people they might have attracted were already in the SNP or were supporters and the SNP was a social democratic party. On the Labour side there was a strong core 'payroll' membership – MPs, Regional and District councillors, trade union officers – and still quite a strong section of traditional loyalist members. Voters already had a choice and the number of radical devo-max activists who

were around and not in the SNP was probably quite small. But the splits were disastrous and came very early.

Let's next turn to a UK-wide example which had an impact on Scotland. The left shift in the Labour Party after 1979 produced a breakaway by part of the Labour right. Former senior ministers – Shirley Williams, Roy Jenkins, David Owen, Bill Rodgers – set up the Social Democratic Party. They had considered but rejected joining the Liberals because they thought they could build a larger base among former Labour voters. Some cynics also thought that there were some very big egos involved who would not have transferred easily into another established party. They had a massively supportive media and a number of senior journalists like Polly Toynbee

were active members. While 25 per cent of their members had previously been in the Labour Party and 10 per cent had been Conservative members, most had never been party members so they were making an appeal to a wider constituency of political 'virgins'. Roy Jenkins won a by-election in Glasgow Hillhead in 1982 demonstrating that they were able to make some inroads in Scotland at the expense of Labour and the SNP. Some of it was just tactical; voters saw it in some seats as the best chance of beating the Thatcher government. But

some were attracted for what they saw as idealistic 'middle-ground' reasons. The SDP had an electoral alliance with the Liberals and they didn't compete against

each other. Their combined vote in the 1983 election was 25 per cent. But there were leadership tensions and declining support. The momentum had gone. After the 1987 election when all the leadership lost their seats, the majority voted to merge with the Liberals but there were bitter divisions and David Owen refused to join. The SDP's main legacy was to ensure that Thatcher had large majorities given the nature of the Westminster electoral system and to give the Liberals/Liberal Democrats some increase in credibility.

Into the more recent period we have the case of Respect in England. Set up

So any post-referendum ideas of a new party have to recognise that the odds are that it will start in a blaze of optimism and end a few years later in bitter recriminations. For people who want to see an effective left space in Scottish post-referendum politics, there are three other possible approaches - a focus on strengthening the left in one existing party, sustaining cooperative alliances across parties or bringing the left in the two major parties together in a new coalition.

in 2004 as an initiative driven largely by George Galloway and the SWP. By 2007 there was bitter feuding and expulsions with two separate conferences and years of dispute over the name. The principal but not the only fault-line was the Galloway/SWP battle with George's ethnic support base being more socially conservative and patriarchal. The battles are too complex and tedious to recount but have continued to the present. Even after Galloway's Bradford by-election win in 2012 and council seat gains in the city, the splintering continued with five

Isobel Lindsay looks at the history of setting up new political parties and expresses little faith that such an initiative in post-referendum Scotland would be any more successful. However, there are alternatives...

Respect Bradford councillors resigning earlier this year. It can only be described as a mess, discrediting the left yet again.

The Scottish Socialist Party saga is so recent and the wounds are still so raw that we are probably better avoiding contested territory. The sad thing is that for several years it looked as if it was going to make a coherent and viable contribution to Scottish politics. Formed in 1998 just before the Scottish Parliament was established, it brought together Militant, SWP, individuals from Labour and SNP and community campaigners. The new electoral system gave small parties opportunities. Tommy Sheridan won a seat in the first election and this brought some credibility. Whatever people may think about later developments, Tommy was politically astute in his parliamentary tactics focussing on attainable objectives like warrant sales and school meals. There was enough self-discipline in the party to keep internal problems subdued and fairly private. In the 2003 election they won six seats and prospects seemed very promising. The divisions in 2004 put an end to this and the rest is history. Tensions which had been there were intensified and brought into the open around the Sheridan trial. All their seats were lost in 2007.

One fairly new party which has survived but not succeeded in growing much is the Scottish Greens. There had been a UK Green Party (previously Ecology Party) since 1985 and elections in Scotland were contested, for example the 1989 Euro election. They became a separate Scottish Party amicably in 1990. They won one MSP seat in 1999, seven in 2003 and down to two since 2007 and they have a number of council seats. The Greens have played a positive role in Scottish politics. They have managed to avoid damaging splits but have not been able to grow significantly in members or votes. They do have the advantage of having a clear ideological position which is distinctive although others may share some of their policies.

What can we learn from the experience of new parties that could offer any guide to post-referendum initiatives? All parties have personality and policy tensions but it is easier to contain them in larger parties with established structures

and cultures. The people forming new parties will tend to have a considerable proportion of strong personalities with high expectations. They will expect to have direct control over most decisions and many on the left have an automatic distrust of leaders who rise above the rank and file. When disagreements arise, they can quickly become toxic and there isn't a big enough base to contain them. The Westminster electoral system makes it extremely difficult for any new party to break through unless they have a very concentrated geographical base. It is much easier in Holyrood elections but the electorate will still tend to prioritise getting the government they want rather than voting for the party which best reflects their opinions irrespective of whether it has any chance of being in power.

So any post-referendum ideas of a new party have to recognise that the odds are that it will start in a blaze of optimism and will probably end a few years later in bitter recriminations. This doesn't mean it should never be tried, just that alternative strategies should be tried first. For people who want to see an effective left space in Scottish post-referendum politics, there are three other possible approaches - a focus on strengthening the left in one existing party, sustaining cooperative alliances across parties or bringing the left in the two major parties together in a new coalition. The first option doesn't require organised 'entryism'. In the late 1960s many people on the left saw the development of the SNP and the possibility of a Scottish Parliament as offering fresh opportunities and on an entirely individual basis joined the SNP and helped to make it a predominantly centre-left party. The substantial growth in membership in that period and the social democratic nature of its policies made it a major player in Scottish politics, winning over 30 per cent of the Scottish vote by 1974. So post-referendum (whatever the outcome), activists might quite informally decide that joining the SNP or Labour or the Greens or the SSP was the most promising way forward.

If it is a Yes vote, the party which will have to face radical reorganisation is Labour. For the first time it will have to

determine its own policies and structures without Westminster so there will have to be a lot of change and, perhaps, opportunity. Especially if there is a Yes vote, both the Greens and the SSP will be in a stronger position having campaigned actively for independence. They have limited but sufficient organisational structure to get involved in the major initiatives that will follow from Yes like developing the new constitution and preparing policies for the first elections. The SNP would clearly be in a strong position for a few years but debates would open up after the necessary discipline of the pre-Referendum period. Overall we could expect politics to be genuinely interesting even exciting and this might mean the potential for big increases in party membership. If it was a No vote, it would be the SNP which would require major internal debates about its future direction but it would have the Holyrood elections to give it purpose.

Unlikely as it seems at present, there might eventually be some opportunity for left sections of the SNP and Labour to come together in a new alliance. This and other forms of cooperation would be difficult in the early years because of the electoral cycle with Holyrood elections less than two years after the Referendum and (if the vote is No) Westminster elections in less than a year. The self-interest of parties large and small tends to take precedence close to elections. The one thing which should and can be done quickly is to develop structures within which those on the left in different parties and organisations can come together and work on policy objectives. The challenges of independence or the problems likely to develop in Scotland after a No vote are big enough to bring a substantial number of the left to the table. Some of these structures are in place - RIC, The Jimmy Reid Foundation, the STUC. Whatever we do, it needs to be organic and flexible, not a doctrinaire, rigid initiative. We don't know yet what the opportunities will be in the post-2014 circumstances but we do have an idea of what we would like to achieve. ■

Isobel Lindsay is a Member of the Project Board of the Jimmy Reid Foundation

Welfare Nation State

Up until the end of 2012, 51,700 jobs have been lost in the public sector in Scotland since 2009. Local government workers in Scotland have had a 10 per cent real-terms cut in wages in the last three years, even greater for workers who have been hit by the increase in pensions contributions, civil servants, health workers, etc. The Scottish government resources budget will amount to £4.5 billion by 2017/18. Sixty per cent of these cuts have still to be made. Sadly, while making the case for an independent Scotland the SNP government continues to pass on the Westminster cuts.

As Scotland heads toward the referendum vote next September, people on the left are beginning ask what kind of Scotland we want to live in. This is an opportunity to seriously consider what kind of Scotland can be built. If independence is to mean anything it must mean an end to sharing out the cuts, it must mean a clean break from the austerity agenda through measures like major wealth redistribution and widespread public ownership. It must mean a genuine political alternative, a commitment to reverse the cuts and to rebuild and repair the coalition government's economic vandalism, in other words - socialist policies.

The market worships 'choice' while restricting it for the broad mass of the population. At its most basic austerity is actually about limiting the choice between health

and illness, education and ignorance and so on. The ruling elite aim to destroy the welfare state that has offered people at least some measure of social security in a system they run for profit not people.

The real question is what do we want from our public services and how can we make sure

There must be democratic accountability, genuine consultation and effective economic planning as to what public services people need and how they are to be delivered and where are they to be located

we develop them, nourish them and protect them from right-wing market driven attack, privatisation and outsourcing. And of course how do we ensure that they are accountable.

There needs to be a serious debate about why public services are vital to any civilised society, what citizens are entitled to expect in terms of a welfare state and a national health service too. A Scotland that rejected

the myths and lies of neoliberalism and worked toward social and economic justice would be a very attractive prospect indeed for the overwhelming majority of people.

Take the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP); why is this department regarded so negatively by so many users? In simple terms the job of this department is to stop people falling into poverty – surely a good thing worthy of respect - but it is now viewed as punishing the unemployed and disabled and driving people to extreme poverty and to the food-banks through a vicious sanctions regime.

There is a real choice here for politicians who want to build a fair, equal and economically efficient Scotland - a choice that would require some honesty from them. Just sticking with the DWP example, all evidence shows societies with strong supportive welfare systems are



John McNally argues that if a vision emerges in the independence referendum debate for investment, rather than cuts, in public services that are democratically run to meet the needs of all Scots, they will be on to a winner.

economically more efficient and wealthier with better rates of equality than those run on the neoliberal model. There is no mystery to this: motivation works better than punishment – so why won't 'progressive' politicians say so?

Let's have a debate that cuts through the nonsense sprayed out daily by corporate-backed politicians and the media. On the question of choice for example: - if I break my leg, I don't want a choice of hospitals to be sent to, I just want the care and reliability of the NHS to look after me, and give me the best care available, regardless of the size of my wallet.

Education, health and welfare were all taken into public ownership because the private sector and charities were incapable of delivering them. Politicians prepared to take on the *Daily Mail* and argue for a supportive welfare state might just find they are tapping into a huge vein of popular support.

How 'government' is perceived is crucially important. The debate has to broaden out so that it is not just about Scottish 'governance' but about Scottish government services: who runs them and for who's benefit?

There must be democratic accountability, genuine consultation and

effective economic planning as to what public services people need and how they are to be delivered and where are they to be located. If we are really to contemplate a new Scotland, the where, why and the status of public services and delivery in Scotland post-referendum should not be viewed through a model that carves off chunks and slices - and drops them on plates marked local govt, central govt, health or Edinburgh, Glasgow and then of course, everywhere else.

To build a Scotland with a future for all it would require a change of mindset that public servants are just there to collect taxes and dole out benefits. Effective government planning can be embarked upon, linked to an extension of public ownership of the utilities and a progressive taxation system that could, even under capitalism, greatly improve the lives of the Scottish people through a strengthened economy that rejects the great lie that only profit matters.

This would mean rejecting the demented neoliberal narrative that holds public services as some kind of drain on an economy rather than what they truly are; an intrinsic part of our economic infrastructure. To show this through a negative example, currently for every job lost in the public sector at least one, probably two and sometimes even three are lost in the private sector.

Scotland could make the choice to build a welfare state that rejects the myths and lies of ruling elites who want to cut as much of the welfare state as they can and privatise what can't be cut.

My union has consistently argued for an economic alternative that puts the public services where they rightly belong, at the centre of society and at the centre of economic planning. It is entirely possible as socialists to both point out the failure of capitalism while arguing for economic alternatives that give working people greater control over their lives and the impersonal corporate forces that dominate them. I suspect those who present a vision of this nature would celebrate victory in the independence referendum. ■

John McNally is National vice-president Public & Commercial Services Union (PCS), he writes in a personal capacity.

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(which used to be the SNP's position – before they became the government!)



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Labour and the trade unions

Gregor Gall reviews Len McCluskey's Annual Jimmy Reid Memorial Lecture and concludes that the Unite leader is perhaps too generous in identifying signs of real change in the Milliband's Labour Party.

At the second annual Reid Foundation lecture, Len McCluskey, general secretary of the largest union in Britain, Unite, proclaimed that at the September 2013 Labour conference Ed Miliband had delivered the most radical party conference speech for thirty years. The reason for this, McCluskey argued, was that Miliband had broken with neoliberal dogma of 'New' Labour.

If this is true, it has massive ramifications for politics in Britain, and specifically for the debates on Scottish independence and union affiliation to Labour. Simply put, the case for independence bringing about social justice would be torpedoed and no union would think of leaving Labour now – and all because the son of a Marxist had moved towards his father's politics by being on the side of working people and being prepared to stand up to the rich and powerful by using the state against them and the market.

What was the evidence McCluskey cited for this massive and unequivocal statement? First, there was the policy of a 20-month price freeze on energy bills if Labour won the next general election. Second, there was the plan to build 200,000 new homes by 2020 (again, if Labour won the next general election). And, third there was saying no to attacking Syria and stopping the Coalition from rushing to war. (He could also have mentioned pledges on the enforcement of the minimum wage, support for the 'living wage', action on blacklisting and abolition of the 'bedroom tax' in the days running up to the speech.)

All these are undeniably positive advances from a Labour leader and Labour Party which have consciously chosen not to more vehemently oppose the Coalition and neoliberalism. But it is a very grave over-estimation indeed to see Miliband's speech as a break with

Labour's own version of neoliberalism or even the beginnings of it.

Just to put the situation into some perspective first, let's remember the manifesto Labour fought the 1997 election on. Amongst the pledges was a windfall levy on the privatised utilities to fund training for under-25s, a national minimum wage, a statutory union recognition law, nursery places for all four year-olds and so on. This manifesto was the high tide of Labour's neoliberalism (i.e. Blairism) but it did include some elements of progress (even if they were inadequate compared to what was needed).

So historically, and without even looking at the previous election manifestos of 1987 and 1992 when Kinnock was leader, McCluskey's claim does not stand up. But let's move to what wasn't in Miliband's speech such as the renationalisation of the railways, ending the Tory anti-union laws, providing a proper statutory union recognition law, bringing back into public ownership the utilities, placing proper regulations upon the financial system and so on and so on, and all of which are Unite union policies.

Then there's the practice of what Miliband and Labour do. Within days of the Labour conference voting to take Royal Mail back into public ownership, Chuka Umunna, Labour's Shadow Business Secretary, disavowed this as too expensive. Then there's the small matter of Labour policies on austerity. There is no rejection of austerity but a version of it, dubbed 'austerity-lite' by Mark Serwotka, PCS union general secretary.

This means no reversal of public sector spending cuts, maintenance of effective wage freezes for public servants, means testing of benefits and so on. After some Blairites were dumped from the shadow cabinet after Miliband's speech, the

new appointees of Tristram Hunt and Rachel Reeves announced support for performance related pay for teachers, academies and further tightening of eligibility for benefits. Just to make the obvious point – there was no talk of raising income tax on the rich, closing the evasion and avoidance tax loopholes, or hiring more HRMC staff to collect billions unpaid in tax.

If Miliband is to make the necessary break with neoliberalism and Labour's adaption to it, he must become a social democrat and adopt social democratic policies (such as those outlined above).

This won't make him a socialist because social democracy is about maintaining capitalism while regulating the processes and outcomes of the market in order to ameliorate its excesses. It's about Keynesianism – tax in the boom years in order to be able to spend in the bust years so as to reflate the economy. Key to all of these is using the state to regulate capitalism.

Of course, to be fair to McCluskey, he did say in his lecture that Miliband hadn't gone far enough, that more was needed and Unite would press for it. He also re-iterated several times that the challenge is for Labour to show that it is on the side of working people. All this, he said, was based upon Labour being

All these moves to the left are undeniably positive advances from a Labour leader and Labour Party which have consciously chosen not to more vehemently oppose the Coalition and neoliberalism. But it is a very grave over-estimation indeed to see Miliband's speech as a break with Labour's own version of neoliberalism or even the beginnings of it.

In light of another period of debate about the relationships between the unions and the Labour Party, we ask three writers to give their perspectives - Gregor Gall, Richard Leonard and Bob Crow

- despite everything - 'the only game in town'. Yet McCluskey has not presented a credible strategy for achieving more from Miliband. And the danger is that he will sow the false seeds of hope in a leader that is not anything close to a social democrat.

So what is going on? Is it all part of a McCluskey long game to bring Miliband under his wing by calling him a 'saint' where previously he went to war with him by calling him a 'sinner' – that is under the control of the Blairites? It's more likely that Unite is doing a trade-off with Miliband – not opposing the reform of the union-party link for policy pledges. This is a dangerous exercise. Not only have the pledges been few and weak but no Labour government has a particularly good record on abiding by its promises when made in opposition. For example, Blair allowed the CBI to turn a simple manifesto pledge on union recognition into an extremely weak mechanism in practice.

Returning to the opening issues, where to stand on the issues of Scottish independence offering a relatively better prospect of gaining social justice and the Union under Miliband being the right road to social democracy? Unfortunately and depressingly, no different to where they were before. This is not to sow alternative illusions in independence or the SNP. Independence or the Union will only offer avenues to substantial social progress once the left gets its act together and starts growing again. ■

Gregor Gall is professor of Industrial Relations at the University of Bradford

Richard Leonard argues that the best way for unions to influence politics is to maintain its close links with the Labour Party

The role of the union in fighting for justice for its members is not confined to the workplace. Nor should it be. The standard of living goes beyond the monthly salary or the weekly wage. It is about quality of life, both inside and outside work and from the cradle to the grave. The noble and enduring

aims enshrined in my own union's rule book include industrial democracy and collective ownership, an equal society, as well as extended legal rights to trade unions and greater social and economic welfare and environmental protection. These all require political action.

So the trade union movement needs a political voice. Anyone who thinks that trade unions and politics can be separated doesn't live in the real world.

That's why over a century ago the GMB's forerunner the Gas Workers and General Labourers Union worked with other new unions like the London and Liverpool Dockers and the Amalgamated Railway Servants to establish the Labour Representation Committee to secure "independent working class representation". Founding Conferences in Edinburgh and then London were convened following resolutions carried at the Scottish and British Trade Union Congresses of 1899.

A year before Keir Hardie had called for "the same kind of working agreement nationally as already exists for municipal purposes in Glasgow". So Hardie's vision and the pioneering role of trade unionists, socialists and co-operators in Scotland became highly influential in the new political formation.

Of course down the years there have been those who claim that the decision by Hardie and the other ILP'ers to create an independent working class party built on the trade unions was a mistake. During my lifetime in politics this 'historic mistake' tendency defected from Labour to help found the anti-trade union Social Democratic Party in 1981, later the Alliance. It then returned to help create New Labour a decade and a half

later, all too commonly and without shame comprising many of the same individuals.

And now this same tendency with some of the same people again founded Progress the limited company, and brazenly "New Labour" (capital "N"; capital "L") pressure group. Progress is busy falsely accusing the trade unions of the domination of everything from candidate selections to the decisions of the Party's National Executive Committee. Its supporters are now buying for the collective disaffiliation of trade unions from the Labour Party.

It is an important matter of political principle that trade unions affiliate collectively to Labour. Trade unions are not a random collection of consumers in a market. We refuse to be run according

to an iron law of individualism, indeed the very point of trade unions is that we live and breathe democratic collectivism. Our aspirations are collective ones, and devised for the common good not to feed individual greed but to advance the greater social and economic welfare of all. Trade unions not trade unionists affiliate to the Labour Party. That is democratic, it is also right and keeps alive the collectivist tradition upon which Labour was also built and should live by.

It is impossible to be an effective democratic socialist without working in combination and solidarity: these are defining principles. To win change we have to build, organise and persuade as well as stir emotion. The principal vehicle for doing that is still the Labour Party.

The distinctive nature of the Labour Party as a party of democratic socialism founded by the trade unions should not be supplanted by a version of the US Democratic Party stripped of its commitment to socialism and robbed of its trade union roots. The GMB and other unions are not merely donors to the Labour Party but affiliates. The link is first and foremost not financial but

constitutional. To move to an American style system where the donor with the biggest buck chooses the policy, and the candidate, puts the political process itself up for sale. This would not be a change for the better but a change for the worse.

So too the idea floated of US-style primaries with Labour 'supporters' voting to select Labour candidates will not herald the end of a so-called 'politics of the machine', it would institutionalise it. For anyone to become a candidate in a primary-style system demands not reduced but significantly increased financial backing.

It is impossible to be an effective democratic socialist without working in combination and solidarity: these are defining principles. To win change we have to build, organise and persuade as well as stir emotion. The principal vehicle for doing that is still the Labour Party. Affiliation to the Labour Party and the TUC and STUC is a direct expression of solidarity and an overt act of combination with other unions. It is also a declaration of the union's identity, that it is part of the wider Labour Movement with sister parties across the world.

And what is the alternative to this solidarity and combination? A place in the political wilderness of non-engagement? A dalliance with a political group to the left of the Labour Party liable to end in bitterness and recrimination, doctrinal faction fights and splits? Either way it represents a false trail. There is no evidence past or present that a breakaway has brought with it greater political effectiveness.

The link between Labour and the unions is forged by shared interests and a common understanding that for the quality of working people's lives to be improved there must be radical social and economic change. That will require a renewal of political education, a commitment to be transformers not simply reflectors of public opinion, active not passive, with a new intellectual edge alongside the old tradition of pragmatism.

It was Aneurin Bevan who observed that "our movement is based primarily on the industrial masses. It is not based so much upon ideologies, as upon social experience." He also famously said "There is only one hope for mankind - and that

is democratic Socialism. There is only one party in Great Britain which can do it - and that is the Labour Party."

I make no apology for remaining on the side of Keir Hardie, those courageous women and men, those trade union and Independent Labour Party pioneers who founded the Labour Party, or for evoking the spirit of Nye Bevan. For this is not to look back to a heroic golden age but to understand better the eternal challenges and the defining purpose of Labour's link with the trade unions today. It is also an important reminder that the future of the Labour Party is well worth fighting for. ■

Richard Leonard is GMB Scotland Political Officer and was a Labour Party candidate in the 2011 Scottish Elections

Bob Crow looks at his union's influence in UK politics today and concludes that disaffiliation to the Labour Party was one of the best things that happened to it

RMT was expelled by the Labour Party in 2004. Our crime? Allowing our regions, branches and members to have a democratic say on what political

By freeing ourselves from the shackles of automatic Labour support, RMT's political influence is thriving with political groups established in the British, Scottish and Welsh parliaments and assemblies that involve a base of supportive Labour representatives, Greens and SNP. The condition for joining is that elected members must sign up to the core political priorities laid down by the union.

parties and candidates they chose to support.

The expulsion centred on Scotland. RMT's executive had agreed to support

requests from the Scottish Regional Council and a number of Scottish branches to affiliate to the Scottish Socialist Party. An RMT AGM decision in 2003 had already cleared the route to create a more flexible political fund, freeing the union up to support candidates in addition to Labour.

The SSP decision provoked a huge political furore with the likes of Ian McCartney wheeled out across the media to denounce RMT and to issue dire warnings that the union was consigning itself to the wilderness.

Nearly a decade on nothing could be further from the truth.

By freeing ourselves from the shackles of automatic Labour support, RMT's political influence is thriving with political groups established in the British, Scottish and Welsh parliaments and assemblies that involve a base of supportive Labour representatives, Greens and SNP. The condition for joining is that elected members must sign up to the core political priorities laid down by the union.

In many ways, RMT's decisions from ten years ago put the union well ahead of the game when it comes to the relationship with the Labour Party. This year, major unions have said that they will be cutting their affiliation fees to

Labour to reflect the number of members who genuinely support the organisation. Others are reorganising their parliamentary groups to clear out the opportunists who take the union support and then back policies that are clearly anti-worker and anti-working class communities.

But the biggest leap of all remains supporting candidates other than those from the Labour Party. It is both inevitable and essential that that issue remains firmly on the agenda. RMT judges candidates solely on their merits as advocates of policies that match the union's own programme and which would deliver for our members, their families and their communities. Let me pull out a couple of examples.

First up, the anti-union laws. Part of the reason why RMT made the decisive changes to our political funds that led to our expulsion from Labour in 2004 was that halfway through its second term the Blair Government had not a lifted

a finger to repeal any of the anti-union laws introduced under the Tories in the wake of the Miners' Strike. Not only had they not made any moves to unshackle the union's but we had the grotesque site of the Labour Prime Minister touring the world boasting about how we had the most lightly-regulated workplaces in the EU – a boast designed solely to encourage bad bosses, the exploiters and the 'filthy rich'.

The latest attack on our basic rights under this current Government is the levelling of huge fees on those seeking redress in the Employment Tribunal, designed to deter those seeking a fair hearing and loading the whole process even further in the direction of unscrupulous, wealthy and bullying bosses. It is surcharge on justice. And what has Labour done? Nothing. Running scared of the employers' organisations and the right-wing press they have allowed the ConDems to force through measures that allow hiring and firing on an industrial scale and which is solely designed to hammer workers and their unions financially.

Running parallel to this betrayal was the stance on privatisation. Even after the smashing up of British Rail in the name of profit led to the avoidable carnage of Hatfield and Potters Bar, Labour, with

the power to act, refused point blank to renationalise the railways. Far from it, it was under John Prescott himself that the PPP privatisation model was rolled out on London Underground until Metronet went bust midstream plunging the system into chaos and forcing a reluctant retreat. How could a rail union sign a blank cheque for Labour against that backdrop?

Even now, after losing an election and seeing polls showing that 70 per cent of the people support renationalisation, Labour offers little or nothing. They talk about the possibility of retaining the successful, publicly owned East Coast/DOR under state control but only as a 'public sector comparator'. On the simple and straightforward question of full public ownership they remain in total and abject terror of the train companies and the Tories.

If you can't even walk the talk in opposition we know exactly what that means from a potential Labour Government in power – absolutely nothing. Ed Miliband blew it the moment he fell into the old Blairite trap and pledged that a Labour Government would stick to this administration's spending levels. Boxing yourself in to a spending straightjacket laid out for you by the most right-wing government in a

generation highlights both a poverty of ambition and a total lack of concern for the lives of those you are depending on to bringing you to power.

There has to be an alternative. RMT has supported, and will continue to support, TUSC candidates and our union is pledged to encourage rank-and-file, working class candidates wherever the opportunity arises. Next year, RMT will play a leading role in fielding a full slate of "NO2EU – YES TO WORKERS' RIGHTS" candidates in every seat with the exception of Northern Ireland. That is a major political operation that will challenge both the neoliberal, pro-boss agenda of the EU and the cynical opportunism of UKIP head on.

At this year's Durham Miners Gala, we issued a call for a new party of labour. RMT has every intention of keeping the debate and discussion going across the broad sweep of the labour, trade union, environmental and social justice movements about what that new political operation should stand for and what it should look like. I hope that you will engage with us in those discussions. ■

Bob Crow is the General Secretary of the RMT



Say NO to ConDem cuts
For all public transport in public hands
For offshore safety
For trade-union rights

Bob Crow, General Secretary

Peter Pinkney, President

Real energy answers

Beyond all the political froth stirred up in recent debates over energy prices, the future of Grangemouth, and the Clyde shipyards, there is one unacknowledged consensus between all the mainstream parties in Westminster and Holyrood. This is the continuing commitment to 'free' markets (whatever that means in a corporate global economy) and private ownership in the organisation of our economy. In the energy sector in particular, and after three decades of impressive policy failure on all fronts, there remains a bewildering consensus in the privatised regime that has held sway now for almost three decades.

We argue in our recent paper for the Jimmy Reid Foundation - *Repossessing the Future: A Common Weal Strategy for Community and Democratic Ownership of Scotland's Energy Resources* - that things can and should be different. In this regard, we are solidly in step with broader public opinion. A recent survey by YouGov found that sixty-eight per cent of the public wanted the energy sector to be renationalised and even a majority of Conservative voters. Yet, with the honourable exception of the Greens, all the political parties with representation in Holyrood and Westminster have set their face against the idea of bringing the energy sector back into public ownership. It is an abject example of the divide between a political elite seeking to curry favour with private (and usually foreign) corporations, and the citizen's everyday social needs and experiences.

It is worth stating the basic failures of UK energy policy since the electricity, gas and energy generation sectors were privatised in the 1980s and 1990s. Prime amongst these must be the failure to deliver cheap energy to consumers. Digging beneath the recent furore, the UK has the fourth highest electricity prices in the European Union despite having an abundance of renewable and non-renewable energy. Married to this are shocking levels of fuel poverty. Our report shows that getting on for forty per cent of Scots suffer fuel poverty, defined as a situation where energy bills account for ten per cent of total income; a figure likely to rise substantially with current and future price increases. Fifty six per cent of pensioners can't afford to heat themselves

properly with 2,000 dying of severe cold every winter. Proportionately, the figure is double that of Finland and far more than Sweden and Germany – countries with their far harsher winter climates.

Beyond such appalling human consequences, energy policy has made a few key individuals and groups very wealthy; not only the chief executives and directors of privatised utilities who receive City-style bonuses and salaries for chronic underperformance but also the few and often ennobled landowners that have received massive benefits from the recent push towards renewables. To cite but one example, the Duke of Roxburgh is set to make £1.5 million per year from a new wind turbine development in the Lammermuir Hills.

The latest largesse aimed at the wealth elites of 'old' and 'new' money reflects two other monumental failures of public policy: climate change obligations and security of supply. In relation to the former, the UK, with less than four per cent of total energy consumption from renewables, is fast becoming Europe's laggard in meeting its own climate change obligations. This is increasingly tied in with real problems of energy supply and the increasingly likely threat of the lights 'going out' because of the failure of the privatised utilities to invest in infrastructure for a post carbon future, as older power stations come to the end of their lives. To meet the minimum of £100 billion required to invest in new energy generation and infrastructure over the next decade or so, governments of whatever hue are having to stitch up a contorted market which guarantees massive returns to private investors while pushing electricity prices to consumers through the roof.

Current UK energy policy is not only bewildering but it is perverse. Setting its face against both any form of major public ownership of the sector, and any form of strategic planning, there is either an ignorance or wilful deceit over what 'private' ownership and 'market' solutions actually mean in practice. Private ownership of course means large corporate, and predominantly foreign, ownership. Sometimes our private owners are actually the French or Chinese state. At other times, it is private equity companies such as Berkshire Hathaway,

which controls the electricity distribution company for the north of England.

The markets that are constructed (they do not exist naturally!) by governments are not really markets in anything like the form that Adam Smith would have recognised. They are not only devoid of real competition but they take almost all of the risk away from the private sector – and put the cost of that risk onto the consumer and taxpayer – by guaranteeing inflated prices over a long term period to cajole companies to invest in a carbon-free energy future.

Interestingly, much of the rest of the world is waking up to the consequences of privatisation and taking energy utilities back into public ownership. Major remunicipalisation drives have been taking place in France and Germany to take the essential utilities back into public and democratic control. Even the European Union's commissioner for energy policy has recently suggested that if key strategic priorities are going to be met, the electricity grid across the continent should be returned to public hands.

As I have written about in the past in these pages, there are plenty of good examples of effective public ownership of the energy sector overseas which could be the model for Scotland. Denmark is particularly compelling for its fusion of grassroots mobilisation, local and community forms of ownership, and state directed longer term planning in developing one of the most successful wind turbine sectors in the world.

In our report, we suggest that five key priorities should underpin an alternative democratic and publicly owned energy sector:

- resources should be commonly owned to benefit the whole of society rather than vested interests;
- resources should be geared to social need rather than private economic return;
- respecting the rights of future generations and the planet, resources should be used sustainably and geared towards tackling climate change and developing a post-carbon economy;
- Scotland's energy system should be planned by public bodies to achieve

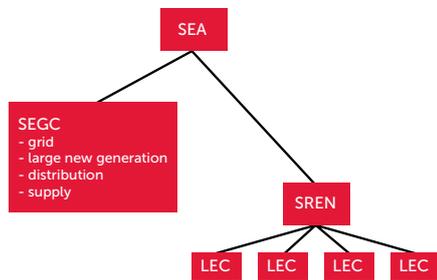
Andy Cumber, author of a Reid Foundation report on how to take Scotland's energy back into public ownership, explains why tolerating the current energy market in Britain makes no sense

security of supply as a priority policy concern;

- public policy should be informed by collective decision-making and public deliberation (rather than faux consultation).

To achieve this, we also need to acknowledge the past failings of nationalised entities that made them such an easy target for Thatcher and the other neoliberals in the 1980s. Over-centralised, bureaucratic entities that exchange one group of elites running things for another will clearly not do. We need forms of organisation and public institution that can combine central strategic direction with democratic accountability and radical public participation. In our paper, we outline a structure that we think will deliver on these key dilemmas.

At the apex of the structure would be a new body, the Scottish Energy Agency charged with overseeing the



sector and setting key objectives and targets. It would have overall strategic control of energy policy, but with a strong remit to shift the country towards a post-carbon future. The SEA would also develop its own research capacity and expertise in energy matters – in partnership with universities, other public agencies such as SEPA and relevant private companies and interests.

Another national body, the Scottish Electricity Generation Corporation (SEGC) would have overall responsibility for making sure 'the lights stay on', i.e. energy security, akin to the UK's old Central Electricity Generating Board. It would take over much of Scottish Power and SSE's existing assets and infrastructure and would be the main body in charge of the energy mix, in ensuring the right degree of spare capacity in the system. It would also

ensure equity in pricing arrangements and service delivery across the system, whilst allowing opportunity for cross-subsidisation and income redistribution to tackle fuel poverty and inequalities in production and consumption costs. In partnership with the SEA it would have key climate change objectives (e.g. increasing energy efficiencies, reducing CO2 from non-renewable sources) but its primary role would be in dealing with energy supply issues.

Aside from these two national strategic public bodies – which could both have a large proportion of their boards democratically elected – much of the rest of the sector, particularly that tasked with generating power could be locally owned by communities, cooperative and local government, as is the case in Denmark. In the interests of promoting more localised forms of public ownership it is proposed that a separate branch for renewable energy should be created, the Scottish Renewable Energy Network (SREN). SREN would provide the main impetus for achieving a shift towards renewable energy and would be composed of local energy companies (LECs) established under local authority and community control throughout Scotland. The scale that these companies should operate at would be a subject for debate and should be contingent on local conditions. For technical reasons, it would make sense to introduce LECs with their own grid networks at the old strategic regional council level for some parts of Scotland (Strathclyde, Lothian, Grampian) to develop greater integrated local energy capacity. Clearly for many remoter highland and island communities, different logics would apply where more community-based associations might develop.

It should be recognised that given Scotland's lack of an industrial strategy thus far towards renewables, much of the expertise is foreign owned, with the result that there is a lack of local content in emerging supply chains. Scotland could have similar policies followed by Norway in the 1980s with respect to North Sea oil in compelling foreign companies to build up local technology, research and development capacity, and local skills in the industry. Norway created its own indigenous industry in less than a decade

as a result. Scotland could do the same.

Giving the SEA the power to oversee this development would also enable it to play a role in encouraging existing local oil and gas-based companies to diversify their skills and knowledge to renewables, especially in the offshore wind field through appropriate subsidies and incentives.

The question that media and other commentators always put at this point is: how do we pay for this? There is a very simple answer. Keeping the lights on is going to cost us hundreds of billions of £s anyway, especially given the neglect of renewal issues by the existing privatized regime. Our public solution will actually cost far less and mean lower prices to consumers than the status quo because it is far cheaper for governments to borrow than the private sector: about 3.4 per cent compared to an average of six per cent according to our estimates. Even allowing for the expected increase in borrowing costs in financial markets over the next few years, it is still plausible that an independent Scottish government – or a devo-max style institution – could issue energy bonds (typically for twenty years given the lifespan of many energy projects) at between three and four per cent as a way of financing the larger capital investments required (e.g. major offshore wind or tidal projects). This solution would both be cheaper in the longer term for the government – because it would own the assets being created – and have the added advantage of keeping fuel prices lower for consumers.

Depressingly, the independence debate has so far been mired in short-term thinking about the economic returns from energy without fundamentally challenging the status quo. A much longer term approach to Scotland's energy is required where energy resources are owned, managed and distributed for the collective good, and on behalf of present and future generations rather than continuing to be appropriated for private and corporate interests. ■

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The logic of conflict

A photograph showing wreath-bearing politicians standing solemnly at the Cenotaph in London; a camera panning over endless white crosses somewhere in the French countryside; a lone bagpipe playing 'The Flowers of the Forest' over an explosion of red poppies - these familiar scenes and sounds instruct us in how to perform remembrance of the First World War. We can expect to be, so to speak, bombarded by them even before the commemorations begin next August. What are they expected to teach us?

The war involved a tragic loss of life, especially of the young. Proportionally, Scotland suffered greater losses than every other nation except Serbia and Turkey. 26.4 percent of those mobilised; 10.9 percent of males of fighting age; 3.1 per cent of the population as a whole. The comparable figures for Britain and Ireland were 11.8 per cent, 6.3 per cent and 1.6 per cent. On the tragedy, everyone can agree; but ask why young and old had to die and the unanimity shatters immediately. Already the bookshelves are groaning under the weight of new volumes offering to explain the outbreak of war, in quite different terms. Some of these, like the efforts by Max Hastings and Jeremy Paxman, are essentially journalistic, respectively expressing the views of the conservative and liberal wings of the metropolitan elite. Others, like those by Christopher Clark and Margaret Macmillan, are genuine contributions to historical knowledge. As we shall see, however, in all cases the arguments have inescapably political implications.

There are essentially two dominant explanations of the war, both well represented in the centenary literature. One dates back to 1914 and was later enshrined in the Treaty of Versailles. It is, of course, that primary responsibility lay with Germany and to a lesser extent its allies Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire. Here is a recent example by Gary Sheffield, appropriately enough a former lecturer in Department of War Studies at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst:

"Britain went to war with Germany in August 1914 for similar reasons to those for which the country fought Hitler's Germany in the

Second World War: to prevent an authoritarian, militarist, expansionist enemy achieving hegemony in Europe and thus imperilling British security. Most historians argue that Germany and Austria-Hungary were primarily responsible for initiating the war (recent attempts to blame Russia are not wholly convincing). Whoever started it, the fact is that in 1914-18, Germany waged a war of aggression that conquered large tracts of its neighbours' territory. As has often been pointed out, there were distinct continuities between the policy and strategy of imperial Germany and its Nazi successor."

The ideological manoeuvre here is not exactly subtle: since most people who are not absolute pacifists tend to accept that Hitler's Germany had to be fought, the comparison with imperial Germany nudges us towards the same conclusion in relation to the earlier conflict, thus conferring on it the undeserved dignity of a war against fascism. The focus on German untrustworthiness also neatly aligns with contemporary Europhobic fantasies about the emergence of a Fourth Reich within the EU.

Was there nothing authoritarian, militarist or expansionist in British behaviour then? Before the war Britain had allowed the death from starvation of five million inhabitants of Madras and presided over the invention of the concentration camp in South Africa. During the war Britain was allied with the feudal-absolutist Russian autocracy and engaged in violently suppressing the national aspirations of the Irish. By the end of the war - presumably in another of its regular 'fits of absence of mind' - Britain had 'acquired' several more oil-producing territories in the Middle East and helped establish the Zionist colony in Palestine. None of this exactly provides moral high ground from which to criticise Germany, which after all only sought what Britain already had - an empire.

The second dominant narrative is to move from what Clark calls an 'overdetermined' explanation involving German agency to an 'undetermined' one. From this perspective there are too

many agencies involved for any ultimate cause to be identified. He begins his - in many ways highly impressive - book by invoking 'contingency' and ends by describing the war as 'a tragedy, not a crime', concluding that 'the protagonists of 1914 were sleepwalkers, watchful but unseeing, haunted by dreams, yet blind to the reality of the horror they were about to bring into the world'. While this avoids making Germany solely or mainly responsible for the war, it also dispenses with the notion of responsibility altogether - or dissolves into a myriad of decisions leading to an unintended, if disastrous result.

Neither scapegoating (of Germany) nor absolution (of the Great Powers more generally) are adequate here. But nor is merely criticising the conduct of the war. In Britain, for example, it has long been acceptable to rail at the leaders of the British Expeditionary Force, the 'donkeys' of Alan Clark's influential book and *Oh! What a Lovely War!* This sounds radical (and in Joan Littlewood's show it actually was) but, as Clark's own Conservative politics suggest, it can also function as an evasion rather than an explanation. Socialists should beware the easy satisfactions of denouncing Haig and Co for their stupidity, for this is both to insult and to exculpate them. They were not lacking in intelligence, nor necessarily unfeeling. They chose to send thousands over the top to their deaths because the military options were relatively limited and an ineradicable risk of being a soldier - although admittedly one under-emphasised by the Ministry of Defence - is to die in the pursuit of strategic objectives. After all, would the war have been acceptable if the levels of death and mutilation had been lower?

In fact, the generals, like the politicians and state managers, were trapped within a structural logic which first led to war and then determined their conduct of it. All historians obviously recognise that the main players were established or aspirant imperial powers; but this fact is rarely given any explanatory power, so long as 'imperialism' is simply regarded as coextensive with colonialism. Yet the concept, at least within Classical Marxism, does not simply involve

As an antidote to the burgeoning jingoism as the centenary 'celebrations' of the First World War approach, Neil Davidson outlines the real causes behind the conflict

relationships of domination by the metropolitan powers over the colonial and semi-colonial world, but also – and in this context, more importantly – relationships of rivalry between the metropolitan powers themselves, a rivalry which fused economic and geopolitical competition. For Connolly in Dublin, Maclean in Glasgow, Luxemburg in Berlin, Lenin in Zurich and Roy in Delhi, the

outbreak of war may have been unintended, but it was not thereby avoidable, except by socialist revolution.

The example of the First World War is important for the left because it illustrates both the inherently warlike nature of capitalism and the way in which seemingly irrational decisions were in fact inescapable given the compulsions of competitive

accumulation. All the major participating states were either already capitalist or in the process of completing the transition. Their empires were important to the metropolitan centres for economic reasons; principally as captive markets, less so as a source of raw materials (except in the case of Britain) and least of all as the destination of investments.

But even where colonies or 'mandates' had no direct economic rationale, this did not mean they were detached from the logic of capitalism. Once the race for imperial territory began in earnest during the closing decades of the nineteenth century, it became necessary for strategic reasons to seize territories which were often of no value in themselves – indeed, which were often net recipients of state expenditure – but which were essential buffers from which to protect those territories which

were of economic value, like India. And in some cases the diplomatic alliances which eventually plunged the world into catastrophe had direct economic origins.

In the case of Russia, for example, grain exports and raw material imports for industry passed through the straits between the Black Sea and the Sea of Marmara or the Dardanelles and the Aegean. Early in 1914 Russia and her

allies forced the Ottoman Empire to grant autonomy to the partly Armenian provinces of eastern Anatolia in order to pull the Christian Armenians under Russian influence. As a result the Turks began to form an alliance with Germany in order to protect the integrity of their empire.

In the case of Britain, surely the most 'capitalist' of all the European Great Powers, economic

specialisation, and the consequent lack of self-sufficiency in food and raw materials, made her dependent on these being constantly available from overseas, which in turn required the Royal Navy to protect the merchant marine. Challenged by the other European Powers, above all Germany, in the naval arms race from the 1890s, Britain began to create the continental system of alliances that would pull her into war.

In both cases the logic of conflict was set in motion by tensions between the metropolitan centres themselves. In this historical moment, threats to overseas markets and sources of raw materials would have been causes for war even if the territories involved had not been actual colonies. This has contemporary implications, not because war is necessarily imminent between the core states of the world system; but direct confrontation is scarcely the only form

of geopolitical rivalry. And here again the First World War is relevant.

The key participants had already been engaged in conflict-at-one-remove before 1914. The Boer War can be seen as a proxy war between Britain and Germany who backed, encouraged, trained and supplied the Boers. In the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5, Germany supported Russia and Britain supported Japan. Since the end of the Cold War we have once again seen war 'by proxy', where the dominant states jostle for influence by supporting different sides in inter- or intra-state conflicts. The different sides supported by France, Germany and the USA during the disintegration of Yugoslavia was perhaps the first example of this strategy in the post-Cold War world; the conflict between NATO and Russia over Georgia (and the divisions within the NATO member states over attitudes to Russia) is the most recent; but similar alignments are beginning to take shape in Central Africa where France is already in the dominant position among the Western powers, but where China is rapidly extending its influence.

If the argument here is correct, then we may be entering a world situation which resembles in several important ways that of 1914. The moment of maximum danger for humanity will come if the contemporary capitalist great powers no longer express their different competitive interests by proxy in the Global South, or assert their interests over lesser states in the developed world itself, but when they directly confront each other on the geopolitical stage. In this perspective the origins of the First World War are not a matter for academic dispute, but a warning of what may await us, with different participants but even greater destructive capacity. In that sense we commemorate those who opposed the war, not simply because they were right, but because we may have cause to emulate them. ■

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When Growth Fails Us

Economic growth was the driving force behind the unprecedented development and prosperity enjoyed by the Western world in the second half of the twentieth century and to this day, it remains the defining feature of the societies in which we live and the cornerstone of the neoliberal economic model.

For decades, the tendency has been to measure progress predominantly in terms of increasing GDP, despite the shortfalls of such a narrow criterion becoming increasingly clear. To this day, however, the orthodox wisdom of growth-driven economics remains widely unchallenged, with solutions to the current problems facing the West often couched in terms of a “return to growth.”

There is however, a growing school of thought that suggests we may reach (or indeed for that matter already have reached) a point at which further growth becomes unnecessary, or even counterproductive—a point at which growth begins to cancel itself out.

Ernest Garcia is one of the main proponents of this view and in this interview he explains why growth is no longer sustainable and discusses the implications for the way we live.

Can you explain why you believe we have reached a point at which further growth offers little to improve the way we live?

For more than two decades, economic growth has not improved the life of the majority of people. All the evidence points to the fact that if we break from the current paralysis and do return to growth, it will make things visibly worse.

The argument is as follows: we experience well-being when we satisfy our needs and there are three sources of this satisfaction, three “spheres of well-being.” The first is the economy: goods and services produced and distributed by the market or the state (e.g. food, clothes, furniture, education received at school or medical care in hospitals). The second is non-mercantile, non-bureaucratised personal relationships, which provide us with care, love, identity and social recognition. The third is the useful functions of nature, such as drinking

water, clean air and sunlight, which are not and cannot be produced. All three can be traded off against each other, but only up to a certain point. We all need someone to love us, but common sense dictates it would be undesirable to have to pay for this love. Likewise, there is no “economic product” able to replace clean air or fertile land. Development is precisely economic growth at the expense of the other two spheres, and like anything else, there are benefits and drawbacks. It is useful while the benefits outweigh the drawbacks, as was the case in Europe, generally speaking, between the end of the Second World War and the end of the 1970s: during this period, economic growth helped improve our well-being. However, since then, the contribution has diminished to the point of stagnation: the economic machine requires considerable effort to maintain the status quo and it is highly possible that the current crisis is a sign that even this zero contribution is coming to an end and that a new phase of growth would result in irremediable deterioration.

Ivan Illich laid the philosophical foundations for the idea that it is possible to reach a point at which growth becomes counter-productive and there are those who have attempted to quantify this using ideas proposed more than 20 years ago by the economist Herman Daly. In fact, it has been shown that the real contribution made by growth to our well-being stops at around US\$7,000 per person. The truth is that everybody knows that the growth machine is going nowhere. The problem is that no one knows how to stop it without the process being traumatic. Perhaps though, the current crisis is pointing the way: the machine is coming to a halt on its own and the cost is extremely high. We were afraid things would change, but they are changing. The process is painful. Why not grab the bull by the horns and consciously face up to the path down?

Most people would accept the idea that there are limits to how much we can consume. Others, however, argue this is merely a value judgement, that we will somehow manage to keep pushing back the boundary through

technological wizardry and scientific progress. How do you respond to these concerns?

In my work as a sociologist, I have studied perceptions of the ecological crisis. If, for example, the matter comes up in a discussion group, the concern often manifests itself in a knot of anxiety (comments such as “we are destroying the planet”), but this knot comes undone when someone says: “they’ll invent something.” There is always someone who says it. This is an expression of faith, of an irrational and extremely strong faith.

This faith, when all is said and done, is one of the pillars of the modern religion of progress. The other is the belief in social reform (or revolution when pushed to its limit). There is a belief that we will be able to find a technological or organisational solution (or a combination of both) to any problem we encounter. Modern social theory in its entirety, all the political ideologies of industrial society, are different versions of the same faith. The idea that there are problems without a technological or political solution is almost unimaginable. Ecological limits are, however, one such problem: in a world with a population of nine billion there will be just 0.16 hectares per person to produce food. This means we will have reached the limit, with hardly any room for manoeuvre. There is no technical miracle that can prevent the situation from being extremely challenging.

Furthermore, all this has happened extremely quickly, making it even harder to assimilate. When we talk about how we have exceeded the limits of the planet, we are talking about a phenomenon that has occurred in just a few decades. As recent as 1950, the world was still half empty. Thirty years later, powered by the religion of development, both the population and the economy were already unsustainable. In just 30 years, we have gone from a situation in which the Earth was half empty (sustainable, in today’s speak) to one in which it is full. This kind of process is unprecedented, a sort of mega-crisis caused by globalisation and acceleration. In a nutshell: the physical scale of human society is too

Spanish sociologist Ernest Garcia explains why returning to growth is increasingly less plausible and discusses the ramifications in an interview with James Kelly.

large and the speed of its actions too fast. De-growth is inevitable: and de-growth will lead to de-globalisation and slowing down.

How might we adapt our economic models to tackle these challenges? How feasible is such a project in the short to medium term?

There is no doubt that it is feasible. We know what needs to be done:

promote policies that free up time for our personal lives and reduce environmental costs.

Succinctly put: work needs to be better distributed, inequality moderated and excesses curbed.

There are already good approaches that show how to measure the results, such as the Genuine Progress Indicator or the Happy Planet Index. The truth is, there's no great mystery. What, then, is missing?

Perhaps the most urgent task is to find the courage to really look at the world differently.

The Fitoussi report was telling. Just a few years ago, the then president of France, Nicolas Sarkozy commissioned a panel of experts to design a new framework for economic accounting, inviting the

economists Joseph Stiglitz and Amartya Sen to preside over it. Upon reading the news, I felt hopeful. Unfortunately, the opportunity was squandered and the final report was of little substance: in the end, when all was said and done, GDP wasn't so bad and the alternatives were not mature enough... But in spite of all this, there is much to be learnt from the episode: everybody (even those on the right!) now know they are looking at economic reality through deforming

glasses and that the information they provide is no longer valuable but deceptive. We need to find the courage to throw these glasses into the bin once and for all and try out others.

For ordinary people, what matters most is everyday life. In Spain, it is becoming increasingly common for pensions to be used to support the recipient and their partner, their long-term unemployed sons and daughters, and perhaps even their grandchildren who are in education. People living this reality

would perhaps be more inclined to accept cuts to their pension if they saw their relatives were able to find jobs with minimal career prospects and a stable income, or that university fees were falling instead of the current outrageous

rises. Yet they face a different reality: a shameless, thieving government, backed by intellectually corrupt experts from the universities, Brussels and the IMF, threatening further cuts to their pensions without changing the conditions of those around them in the slightest. There can only be frustration, depression and resistance to change.

It is striking how reality is becoming reduced to a simplistic and deceptive schema based on austerity, which must be overcome, and growth as our modus operandi. Indeed, given that more growth is impossible, austerity in fact becomes inevitable. It is an inevitable consequence of the ecological overshoot and monstrous financial bubbles. The planet won't give more and we can't go on living on credit. In other words, our circumstances will force us to live with less. Luckily, in some aspects, we can live better with less. The dominant voice of the European left in this debate strikes me as rather incoherent: how can there be "no cuts, no austerity, no rescue of the banks," and at the same time be no problem in continuing to increase debt, both public and private. This is the flip side of the same ideological lunacy of "bubble plus innovation" that has got us into the current mess.

In the midst of the crisis during the 1970s, Enrico Berlinguer, European Communist leader at the time, stated that "under the current circumstances, a genuine and effective fight for a better society is unimaginable without starting from the essential requirement of austerity." This was true at the time, in spite of being widely misunderstood. It is even truer now.

Can you outline some of the main aspects of such social changes?

In a word: de-growth. This will entail re-localisation, decentralisation, scaling down, etc. The difficulty, however, lies in the fact that these things can take on diverse and contradictory forms. In practice they may be associated with all sorts of opposing effects, functioning by trial and error. Re-localisation implies more weight for the community. Yet while the community is associated with greater levels of cohesion and solidarity, it

is also associated with greater uniformity, control and restrictions on individual freedom. We know that decentralisation does not result in generalised improvement or deterioration, but diversity. We also know that small can be beautiful, but it can also be fragile. The crisis of globalisation may favour curbing unnecessary excesses but may at the same time result in the temporary scarcity of basic resources. Finally, a stationary state favours equilibrium, but this also means less social change and that it comes at a slower pace. All this may seem unattractive from the point of view of the prevailing values of our industrial society: as early as the nineteenth century, Stuart Mill was criticised because a stationary state would be boring. In the end though, what is so wrong with a prospect of comfortable boredom?

And the political implications?

When faced with the question of where de-growth will be felt, I always come to the conclusion that it is hard to say in specific terms. Inevitably,

however, it will be noted in everything in our social existence with a physical dimension. Both socio-mass, a somewhat ugly but suitably graphic term coined by Kenneth Boulding to refer to the population of individuals and artefacts, and throughput, which refers to the flow of energy and materials that sustains the socio-mass, must be reduced. When you look at the bigger picture, this much is more than clear.

The problem, however, is that the reduction in scale will be achieved by reducing one thing at the expense of another. Choosing what to target is, at least in part, political, and this will become an essential feature of politics over the coming decades.

If the environmental impact of the activities of our societies is too high, it will be necessary to reduce the underlying factors. In other words: the population, patterns of consumption and the aggressiveness of technology. Moreover, we must act on all these factors, not just one, since if we only act on one, the others will cancel it out. This is de-growth. The role of politics,

then, is to devise and implement benign forms of de-growth that are compatible with maintaining sufficient levels of well-being and freedom. It goes without saying that this won't be easy, but since de-growth will take place regardless, perhaps it would be best not to leave it in the hands of a dangerous combination of the requirements imposed upon us by nature and the free market. We can all find unpalatable aspects of demographic control, restrictions on consumption or giving up the right to certain technological playthings, but it is hard to imagine this being even remotely as unpleasant as the effects the aforementioned combination is beginning to produce and those it promises in the near future. ■

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Reviews

Class, Nation and Socialism: The Red Paper On Scotland 2014

Edited by Pauline Bryan and Tommy Kane, Glasgow Caledonian University Archives, ISBN: 9781905866687, £7.99, pp197.

This Red Paper follows on from its two predecessors in 1974 and 2005. It comprises 25 contributors (consisting of academics, trade unionists, campaigners, MPs/MSPs, political campaigners and councillors) and 25 substantive chapters plus an overall introduction and section introductions. Like its predecessors, the 2014 version provides a comprehensive overview of the state of Scotland in terms of de-industrialisation, the influence of neoliberalism and the outcomes of social inequality and poverty. Many of the chapters also have fairly clear ideas on what needs to be done to right these wrongs.

That said, for a volume with the title of *Class, Nation and Socialism* and targeted upon 2014 in its subtitle, it has remarkably little explicit bearing on the issue of Scotland's combined political and constitutional future. Moreover, only a few chapters directly deal with the

issue of political strategy. Consequently, it misses a trick so that neither is the political strategy of the Red Paper Collective fully articulated and nor can it be assessed. This is a great pity and a missed opportunity. When the book does actually address 2014, it hits out at false targets, merely compounding this problem.

The starting point for the volume is given in the introduction: "any constitutional change must be measured against its potential to challenge the power of capitalism and bring the economy under democratic control" (p3). That, I think, we can all agree upon. Then it states we must use the SNP's version of independence to make the measurement. That, however, is only a partial truth. It would be like saying that the case for the Union can only be measured by the Better Together's version of it (and not also the Red Paper's version). And, it seems to rule out any potential movement in a radical direction under independence. This poor formulation is then compounded by blithely asserting that "the answer to the problems facing people in Scotland is not to be found in a flag [or] a border ... [with some] mistak[ing] constitutional change for social change" (p4,8).

This formulation is repeated on other occasions by Katy Clark (p67) and Roz Foyer (pp159, 164). I think you'd struggle to find anyone on the pro-independence radical left that would think this so there is a perverse political perspective here. This does the occasions on which serious arguments are made later on in the volume a grave disservice.

The chapters by John Foster and Richard Leonard are as solid as ever but they do not answer their own key question, namely, if control of the economy in Scotland increasingly lies outwith its own borders, why is Britain any more able to rein in the capitalists than a Scottish state might be? Is not the direction we need to travel in to have supra-state regulation of a globalised and neo-liberalised capitalism?

In terms of the implicit conclusions of many of the chapters, it is not until the very last chapter that Pauline Bryan lays out the case for a federal Britain. This is much too late and much too little (in terms of the length and depth of the argument) because it potentially provides not only the scaffolding for all the other articles but is the one of the two key cutting edges of the Red Paper Collective against Better Together (the other being radicalism). It leaves earlier views on devolution within Scotland and the use of existing devolved powers looking at little bit adrift.

In some other contributions (like those of Lynn Henderson and Tommy Kane, James Gillies), there is an unhelpful tendency to say that regardless of the constitutional outcome, the left needs to win x or y. The problem here is that this leads to a form of abstentionism because the constitutional settlement does have an important bearing upon the ease and possibility by which x or y can be won. It will reflect the balance of political power in society and certain outcomes open up or close down particular avenues.

In light of this critique, the strongest chapter is probably that by Vince Mills and Stephen Low precisely because it starts to put some meat on the bone of political strategy. But it is also worth mentioning that Katy Clark provides a sober and realistic assessment of what the left needs to do and what it can actually do as a result of its own marginalisation. This sense of the left's own limitations must very much guide what the Red Paper aspires to, namely, working class unity north and south of the border as the basis of resistance to neo-liberalism rather than the 'classless nationalism' of the SNP and Labour. Ironically, the responses to the aforementioned deficiencies of this Red Paper are to be found – not in the pro-independence chapters – but in the chapters by many of the same Red Paper authors in *Time to Choose: Scotland's road to socialism* published by this magazine.

Gregor Gall is professor of industrial relations at the University of Bradford.



Web Review

No wonder the popularity of the EU has taken a knock in the UK. Every time there is a dispute over the interpretation of EU legislation there is no one body in the UK you can go to in order to receive a definitive interpretation. The latest stooshie is over the introduction in Scotland of a “living wage” through the public sector procurement system. As it so happens this is being done in London by Boris Johnson but was challenged through no less than two separate legal opinions by his own party’s ministers. Here’s a report of the maelstrom:

“Ministers commissioned two separate legal opinions on the London Mayor’s scheme in the last two years and both found “risks” that it breached rules on procurement, the Telegraph has learnt Mr. Johnson is understood to reject the assessment. The Mayor’s office said thousands of people working on the capital’s transport network, policing and fire authorities had already benefited from his policy. They will be entitled to at least £8.55 per hour this year, the minimum judged by the “living wage” campaign to be necessary for a decent standard of life. Mr. Johnson called for the rate to be paid by all local authorities in London, as well as across Whitehall departments. “By building motivated, dedicated workforces, the Living Wage helps businesses to boost the bottom line and ensures that hard-working people who contribute to London’s success can enjoy a decent standard of living.” The Greater London Authority group, including the Mayor’s policing, fire, and transport departments, includes the living wage “as a requirement” when contracts are let or renewed.

The Scottish Government’s opinion was contained in a policy note after taking advice from the European Commission. No brave rejection from Edinburgh:

“The European Commission has clarified that public bodies cannot require contractors to pay their employees a living wage as a condition of participating in

a tendering exercise or through a contract performance clause. Public bodies can, if they wish, still encourage contractors to pay their employees a living wage.”

A requirement regarding the payment of a ‘living wage’ would in practice be linked to the tasks necessary for the performance of the contract, and therefore be used as a contract performance clause. Such clause would have to be non-discriminatory and known in advance by all candidates for transparency reasons. The EU Parliament, in response to a parliamentary question about Living Wage contract conditions, provided helpful clarification on this issue:

“Living wage conditions may be included in the contract performance clauses of a public procurement contract ‘provided they are not directly or indirectly discriminatory and are indicated in the contract notice or in the contract documents’. In addition, they must be related to the execution of the contract. In order to comply with this last condition, contract performance clauses including living wage conditions must concern only the employees involved in the execution of the relevant contract, and may not be extended to the other employees of the contractor. In summary our advice to authorities is therefore:

- for all service contracts a consideration of social value must be carried out pre-procurement and this may be an opportunity to consider whether the Living Wage is a relevant and proportionate matter for the contract under consideration;
- it may be easier (arguably less amenable to challenge) to include the Living Wage as a contract performance condition than to use the Living Wage requirement as a contract award criterion;
- a Living Wage contract condition must be relevant and proportionate in respect of the contract being tendered and should not seek to go beyond those employees engaged on the contract, in line with the EU Parliament clarification of 2009;

- the authority will need to ensure transparency about the fact that it has a Living Wage performance condition by making this clear on the face of the OJEU notice and/or the tender documents. Ideally we would advise specific reference to the condition in the OJEU notice itself.”

So it seems the Scottish Government gave up much too early. Paying a ‘living wage’ has a range of potential benefits to workers, companies and the government, according to an academic study commissioned by campaigners. The study looked at the experiences of workers and companies in London where the living wage has been introduced. The London living wage was calculated to be £8.30 an hour in 2011, based on what was needed by the average household type to cover basic living costs. This compares with the current minimum wage of £6.08. The key findings of the report were:

- Over half of employees (54 per cent) felt more positive about their workplace once the living wage was introduced. Staff leaving rates fell by 25 per cent.
- Reputational benefits to companies were significant, including helping to attract new business/customers and recruiting professional staff.
- Wage cost increases associated with the living wage averaged 6 per cent, despite low-paid staff receiving much higher increases than this in their hourly rate of pay (an average of 26 per cent). The cost increase was offset through savings such as new working practices, lower management overheads, and in some cases reduced working hours.
- The London living wage made a significant difference to the disposable income of households that did not claim (or were ineligible to claim) social security benefits and tax credits.
- If all low-paid Londoners were paid a living wage this could save the government £823 million a year by increasing the tax base and reducing benefit spending.
- The minimum wage should be raised to the living wage level. ■

 Henry Mcubbin

KICK UP THE TABLOIDS

Referendum finally comes alive - cake or chips?

The last time I stood in for this column of Vlad's, I took the opportunity to bemoan the fact that the efforts of the hardworking satirical comedian were being seriously undermined by the politician's sheer capacity for farce. Now it seems that my words may have had some effect as the comedy fraternity have retaliated with Russell Brand and his party political broadcast for those with fuck all understanding of politics.

You can see how this has happened...

The public perception is that there's very little to separate your average politician from the infamous erstwhile comedy child catcher; one is a sexually depraved narcissist with a penchant for antagonising pensioners... and the other is Russell Brand, and it's perhaps for this reason that his Paxman interview has resonated with so many. The sweet relief of a political ideal being expressed by a man who knows he's an idiot as opposed to the same old lies being stuttered by an autobot, convinced despite all evidence to the contrary that he is not, is such a bold change from the mind-numbing norm that there's not been this many people talking about voting since Susan Boyle gave up her job as a Johann Lamont impersonator and auditioned for Britain's Got Talent.

In one sense, I cannot help but applaud Brand's furthering forays into demagoguery. He has at least tried to use his position to provoke questions

and elevate thinking. That's more than most politicians achieve in a career. For example, the only questions Danny Alexander has ever provoked me to ask is if suicide really is an option.

The only questions Danny Alexander has ever provoked me to ask is if suicide really is an option

I can't but admire Brand's poking. My problems are not with his questions but his answers. By propagating the idea of the non-vote as a real form of political expression, Brand has legitimised apathy. He's now given permission for people to excuse themselves from thinking, from politically engaging

with the world that they live in because they're waiting on some mythical revolution to kick in. This is essentially the same strategy that fundamental Christians have used for decades to excuse themselves from doing anything that might be considered Christian by anyone other than themselves. By adopting the same Waiting for Godot approach, Brand has further thwarted any chance of anything remotely revolutionary happening for the foreseeable future. And that's a problem for Scotland because we could be on the verge of one. A democratic one, but a revolution none the less and the only way to make it happen, is by doing exactly what he's suggesting we shouldn't.

Less than a year from the most important decision our country has made for 300 years and I'm still struck by the national nonchalance that is prevalent. There are times when it would be easy to mistake our collective

reaction to the possibility of being an independent country as a response to the question does Scotland prefer chips to cake? In fact, there's a strong argument to suggest that question would be far more passionately fought over. The fight wouldn't last for long, be quite sweaty and involve a lot of timeouts for heart resuscitations and diabetes related injuries but the passion would be there. For a nation so obsessed with its past, it's frustrating to see such a flippancy about Scotland's future and the very worst possible outcome for this referendum is that we sleepwalk into a decision because people mistake not voting with the forming and expressing of an actual opinion.

As much as I disagree with Brand's method of registering dissent I do however, envy his ability for aspirational thinking. As a Yes supporter I am dismayed that the little argument that has managed to permeate the national psyche, has been focused on what Scotland would be after independence as opposed to what it could be. More than that, I also agree that the definition of insanity is to repeat the same behaviour and expect different results. If Scotland were able to adopt a small modicum of Brand's positive thinking, it might be the very thing to help propel us into into a fairer, more accountable and more transparent political landscape. Now that would be revolutionary. If only we'd vote for it.... ■



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